



Our Communities (OC) of Northwest Stokes

A planning and development initiative

Francisco, NC

Construction Professionals Network Institute:

Francisco Elementary School

Observations and Recommendations

April 6 & 7, 2016



PDF Editor



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CPNI Mission and Focus

The Construction Professionals Network Institute, Inc. ("CPNI") is a non-profit initiative focusing on construction industry related projects and community service throughout the State of North Carolina. CPNI was founded in 2006 by CPN of North Carolina, Inc. ("CPN"), a non-profit construction industry membership organization, to expand its mission of service to the construction industry and provide assistance to communities throughout North Carolina. CPNI was incorporated as a non-profit § 501 (c) (3) corporation in 2011 to focus on education and community services.

The CPNI mission statement is to "utilize our diverse expertise for the common good of the membership, industry and community."

CPNI volunteers its members' design and construction industry expertise as a catalyst to empower communities across North Carolina to improve their physical and economic environment. CPNI responds to these issues with original research, educational programs, and community service involving all aspects of the Construction Industry. CPNI members are passionate in sharing their diverse expertise to empower the communities to help themselves.

Thousands of volunteer hours by CPNI members are focused on and conducted on activities within North Carolina each year. CPNI strives to identify emerging issues related to industry performance, economic development and the betterment of CPNI members and the communities they serve.

CPNI places great value on the diversity of its membership. All of the operational and administrative activities of CPNI are currently provided by volunteers from the CPN membership and through contract relationships with professional/support organizations and student interns and researchers through North Carolina universities and institutions of higher education. Operational funding has been provided through annual CPN member contributions and pledges as well as corporate and foundation grants.

CPNI concentrates on revitalization initiatives by focusing on revitalizing, and reinvigorating the legacy built environment and infrastructure of Tier 1 and Tier 2 communities across the State of North Carolina. As North Carolina's economy shifts away from legacy industries such as tobacco, textiles, and furniture, a large amount of the State's industrial and commercial built environments and utility infrastructure, in both the urban and rural setting, lie either dormant or abandoned.

These dormant assets represent a tremendous investment of sunken capital in terms of economic, environmental and social resources. Many of these once busy properties are now potential EPA Brownfield Program sites, suspected of contamination, or in an unknown condition. They remain unused and underutilized assets on the community balance sheet. Because they are difficult to reposition and revitalize, they continue to lie underutilized or dormant resulting in a negative impact on the surrounding community fabric.

CPNI offers the comprehensive professional and technical expertise of its membership and collaborating partners, tailored to the specific project at hand, to assist these struggling Tier 1 and Tier 2 rural communities. CPNI values our relationships with each community and respects each community's values and unique attributes. CPNI's role is to work with local governments and community leaders to facilitate

discussions and efforts toward redevelopment strategy, community engagement, visioning and financial considerations.

As of May 2016, CPNI has completed or has engagements underway in Shelby, Windsor, Ramseur, Thomasville, Elkin, Siler City, Maysville, Banner Elk, Pembroke and Francisco.



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The Francisco Elementary School (FES)



Francisco is a rural community in the northern part of Stokes County, North Carolina. About twenty miles from Mt. Airy, six miles from Hanging Rock State Park, within a stone's throw of the Dan River, Francisco is home to farmers, naturalists, entrepreneurs, students and retirees from all walks of life. There are about 4,500 people in this northwest area of Stokes County.

In February, 2016, the Stokes County Commissioners agreed to take ownership of the Francisco Elementary School located centrally in that community. The school had been closed the previous year due to a reduction in the number of students (from approximately 7,500 students to 6,200 for Stokes County) and a consolidation of school facilities in other areas of the county. The closing of the school created emotional as well as practical repercussions throughout the Community. Generations of citizens had attended the school, and it had become a central focal point for this part of Stokes County!

The building served as an elementary school for many generations prior to closing. Although not classified as an historic structure, the Community of Francisco wishes to preserve the building and to re-engage it as a community hub for the surrounding area.

The original building was built in 1951 and consisted of a lunchroom and two classrooms. In 1955 three classrooms and a kitchen were added. In 1974 another building was constructed which led to a

gymnasium, administration offices, media center, computer lab and four classrooms. An enclosed walkway connects the two main buildings. Both buildings together comprise approximately 25,000 sf. There is also a detached concrete block building (Agriculture Building) at the back of the property that was built in 1955. The facility faces NC Hwy 89 which runs along the school's north property line and is located between the Presbyterian Church and the Community Building which offers space for much needed youth and senior activities / meetings. The three buildings form what can be considered the center of the community. To the northeast of the main school building is a large open area partly dedicated as ball fields and a playground. The remainder of the open area acts as a landing zone for the EMS helicopter should the need arise.

Due to the sprawling nature of the community, Francisco suffers from a lack of identity. Where does Francisco begin and where does it end? The closing of the school amplified this fact. In years past, when the textile and tobacco industries flourished Francisco played its part as host for interactions between players in those industries. In fact Francisco once sported a post office and a retail store with the 'best bologna sandwiches' in the County.



Over the past year, concerned citizens of the area have rallied to create the **Our Communities of Northwest Stokes (OC)**. They banded together to brainstorm, to network and to begin mobilizing the rural Northwest / North Stokes County population by creating a coordinated planning process. They understand the need to build critical mass locally in order to drive and manage development with a sustainable plan.

Their priorities include:

- Revitalize education
- Develop outdoor community spaces
- Strengthen support for community centers and local organizations
- Expand support for local businesses with a vision for economic development
- Accelerate the build out of broadband internet in the County
- Make the process transparent so everyone knows what is going on

As the following list of OC participants illustrates, they have built upon the strengths of each individual in order to focus on a consolidated trajectory for the development of this facility. It is not a matter of if it will happen. It is a matter of when a repurposed Francisco School will achieve its role as a unifying hub, as an anchor institution, serving Northern Stokes County.

Team Participants

OC Volunteers, County Staff and Newspaper Reporter

- Bettye Barrett – OC Business and Tourism Team Leader
- Stan Barrett –OC Communications Team; Vice Chair, Nonprofit Board
- Kathy Blue – OC Beautification and Outdoor Enhancement Team Leader
- Sylvia Burton – OC Communications Team; Weekly columnist The Stokes News
- Paula Duggan – OC Lead Coordinator, Strategy
- Matt Edwards – OC Youth Initiatives Team Co-Leader
- Texie Jessup – OC FES Repurposing Team Leader, VP, Nonprofit Board
- Amanda McCreary – OC Youth Initiatives Team Co-Leader
- Jo Ann Stimson – OC FES Repurposing Team; Chair & President, Nonprofit Board
- Horace Stimson – OC Broadband/Technology Team Leader; OC FES Repurposing Team, OC Outside Resources
- Maggie Watson (Lillith's mom) – OC Team Development, OC Outreach Team Leader; Secretary, Nonprofit Board
- Rick Morris – County Manager
- David Sudderth – Building Department, Code Review, Economic Development
- Nick Elmes –Editor, The Stokes News



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County Elected Officials (Board of County Commissioners - BOCC)

- Leon Inman- Chair, County Commissioner
- James Booth – Vice-Chair, County Commissioner
- Ernest Lankford – County Commissioner
- Jimmy Walker – County Commissioner

CPNI VOLUNTEERS:

- Jody Efird, team leader – Architect, ESPA Architects & Planners
- Tori Small – Engineer, Westcott Small & Associates
- Doug Burns – Architect, KSQ Design
- Kelli Goss – Attorney (Architect) Conner Gywn Schenck, PLLC
- Manan Adhyaru – Engineer, S&ME, Inc.
- Jessica Freeman – CPN Staff

We wish to thank the Francisco Presbyterian Church and its Pastor, Tracey Collins, for providing an excellent facility for our visit and workshop.



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APRIL 6 & 7, 2016 VISIT and WORKSHOP

- CPNI volunteers and Community Volunteers (OC) began the first day by meeting at the Presbyterian Church located near the Francisco Elementary School (FES).
- The OC went through the history of the school and the circumstances surrounding its closing. Many of those in attendance had been students including their parents as well as their children. The FES acted as the heart of Francisco and the surrounding communities.
- The OC gave a breakdown of their committee structure.
- Each Team within the OC delineated what their focus was and what had been accomplished to date.
 - Short term pre-restoration uses
 - Post restoration uses
 - Economic development
 - Youth initiatives
 - Business & tourism
 - Broadband
 - Outreach & team development



Pictured from left: Jimmy Walker, Horace Stimson, Jody Efird



Pictured from left: Texie Jessup, Tori Small, Kelli Goss, Matt Edwards, Amanda McCreary

- After meeting adjourned, the entire Team discussed issues and ideas over lunch which was provided by various cooks throughout the community. Everything was excellent but the banana pudding was a Team favorite.
- Following lunch, the CPNI team was shuttled to the school for a tour of the facility and then a tour of the surrounding areas.

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Pictured from left: Stephen Jessup, Nick Elmes



Pictured from left: Jody Efird, Jo Ann Stimson, Doug Burns, Horace Stimson

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Interior Moveable Wall System



Interior damage from roof leak

OBSERVATIONS

School Tour:

1. The FES has a prominent presence from Hwy 89. However there is no definite sense of entry and point of arrival.
2. The Gym / Auditorium has a leaky roof resulting in damage to an interior wall.
3. The FES is an open plan school meaning many of the walls can be taken down or relocated implying flexibility.
4. The FES has been closed for approximately one year.
5. There is heating and air conditioning with the units set at 55/80 degrees.
6. There is a Community Room in the firehouse which is across the street from the FES.
7. The OC feels the need to move quickly due to the June, 2017 date to complete a feasibility and sustainability plan.
8. By renaming a portion of the school property and thus creating 'Francisco Park', this is a good stepping stone to obtaining \$2k grant from County
9. FES is on septic system. Repurposing the building must take into account the septic system limits.
10. Changing the use of the school will trigger code issues. OC was advised to do calculations to determine the capacity of the existing septic system which in turn will determine the impact on the utility infrastructure.
11. Security camera in administration area is on and working
12. Water tower in back of property is empty.
13. Facility is not sprinkled.
14. 10 acres of property. What is the highest and best use for this property?
15. Asbestos is present in the concrete block building in back and may be present in other areas of the main school building. An older asbestos report was found in administration area.



Connector between building wings



Typical classroom



Concrete block building at back of property known as the Agriculture Building

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Surrounding Area:

1. FES is on same road that leads to Hanging Rock State Park. (A different way of thinking is Hanging Rock is on the same road that leads to Francisco.)
2. There is no grocery store or retail. Residents travel ten to fifteen miles to get a loaf of bread, go to the post office, purchase fuel for their vehicles, buy farm and maintenance supplies, or find a selection of places to eat.
3. Jessup Mill has river access, tubing, camping, hiking, music, trails
4. Friends of Horseshoe is a nearby serene park-like development
5. The Vineyard is an international Christian camp
6. A new county law recently passed determining that no alcohol will be allowed while tubing on the river
7. There are members of many small communities including Aarons Corner, Asbury, Collinstown, Double Creek, East Westfield, Francisco, Harts Store, and others engaging with OC as this initiative gains traction.
8. There is a nearby elastic plant has been closed for some time. It recently has been purchased for use as a warehouse.
9. There are thousands of additional visitors to the Pilot Mountain/Mt. Airy/Dan River area.
10. Spencer Penn, just across the Virginia state line, is a good example of a community that rallied to create a community center. They have expressed an interest in a collaboration with the OC.

CPNI Thoughts over Dinner:

1. The OC is passionate and creative.
2. They need to create a priority list of ideas. Focus on long term goals.
3. Many ideas voiced will not generate revenue.
4. Zoning – allowing recreation on site will not be a problem
5. Immediate Facility Needs –
 - i. Code Analysis
 - ii. Building Envelope Analysis
 - iii. Condition the space immediately to prevent problems down the road
6. Rural America is a good term and one the area wants to embrace
7. Consider tapping into Winston Salem for aerial photos of region to study growth patterns. How will overflow from larger communities affect Francisco?
8. Hanging Rock gets 600,000 visitors a year. Many are day trippers. Many are outdoors people. How can community entice those visitors to Francisco?
9. There are thousands of other visitors coming to the area to hike and use the Dan River for outdoor entertainment. How can community entice these visitors to linger in Francisco?
10. And if they entice them what will keep them there? Lodging, eateries, retail?
11. Can they create a survey of Hanging Rock visitors to find out needs? Include questions specific to day trippers.
12. Can the FES be made the center of the community again? With farmer's market, crafts, making jams, other classes. Things that appeal to day trippers. Take crafts, jams and sell at Hanging Rock and drive people to Francisco. This will take time.

13. Focus on phasing:

- a. Phase I take care of playground, ball fields, community garden
- b. Phase II develop farmer's market, classes, products



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Team Brainstorming & Wrap-up:

1. The team met again at the Presbyterian Church where the CPNI team expressed their overall thoughts about FES.
2. It was easy to endorse what has been done to date. The group is organized and has done an excellent job of keeping everything transparent making sure that people at every level are included.
3. Biggest asset is the people. They have a sense of who they are and want to share that.
4. They want to extol rural America.
5. As they move forward it is important for them to make sure everyone is on the same page, know what options are available to them and to be a collective voice for what they want to have accomplished with the school.
6. It is important that elected officials and the County at large support what they plan to do. It will take time and money.
7. Their big picture focus is on Northwest Stokes. Their near term challenge is repurposing the school in Francisco. It was stressed that they look toward the bigger picture and the potential that tourists to nearby areas could bring. How do they get tourists off the mountain and into their community?
8. How can the OC tap into the nearby historic hotel that is being restored?
9. Use the school system as an asset and team player.
10. Tap into what Yadkin Valley transportation is doing in the area.
11. Tap into bike clubs, car clubs and find out what their needs are as they traverse the area.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Critical items to complete with the structure

1. Perform a building assessment with particular attention to asbestos and building codes. Study needs to be done before building is occupied. If asbestos is discovered it must be corrected before anyone can utilize the building.

A general rule of thumb for budgeting assessments is \$0.15 - \$0.25 per square foot of building. This budget price probably would not include destructive testing. More than likely it would include a report with photos, general recommendations and very broad budget numbers for repairs as outlined in the report.

Funding may be available through resources associated with The Rural Center and other similar organizations.

2. Develop a timeline with 3 categories: short term (4-6 months), middle term (6-15 months) and long term (future goals).
3. Bring the building up to ADA compliance including door swings, HC accessibility, toilets, etc.
4. Obtain septic evaluation.
5. Repair leaks in roof.
6. Turn on HVAC to circulate air and maintain the building against winter freezing and stagnant air.
7. Develop budget for above items with priorities taking precedence.
8. Provide a sense of entrance to FEC

Suggestions for community group:

1. Look at bigger picture. Streamline focus on community's immediate needs versus future uses. Define a plan for proceeding.
2. Reach out to Forsyth and Surry Counties for aerial maps. Research the growth patterns of surrounding areas specifically as they relate to I 74. Where will the population want to live when growth around the towns and cities occurs?
3. Define Francisco as a 'center' with banners, street signage. So that visitors know at what point they arrive and at what point they leave.
4. Visit Hanging Rock. Discuss with them about distributing a survey in order to find out what visitors want beyond their visit to the park.
5. Consider hosting a festival; bluegrass, artists from the area, etc.
6. Call on Rural Center, NC Growth, Z-Smith Reynolds for grants and assistance.
7. Tap into local families who will be willing to invest in the FES and OC Plans.

Recommended Uses for FEC:

1. Facility would perform well as mixed use center that would serve the entire community. It would also act as a focal point for tourists.
2. Mini health clinic (triggers building code issues)
3. Farmer's market with Francisco branding; jams, honey, crafts, musicians, etc. (triggers building code issues)
4. Classes for adults (triggers building code issues)
5. Little league, football leagues, etc. – immediate need
6. Put travel/tourism committee in the building (triggers building code issues)
7. Other non-profits (triggers building code issues)
8. Create series of kiosks with Francisco branding for use locally as well as on trails, at tourist areas, etc.
9. Look into adding a post office
10. Keep seeking sources of income and grants; it is a continuous job
11. Work with surrounding communities to build Northern Stokes County Brand
12. Triggering building code issues is not insurmountable. Working with and through the codes is a process.



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Summation:

1. Community and Culture – it is vibrant with artists, investors, musicians and passionate community members.
2. Go after ways to entice 600,000 tourists to Hanging Rock to travel five more miles to use the river, the trails and other area amenities.
3. Go after ways to entice additional visitors who use the Dan River and adjacent trails.
4. There is an immediate need to use the ball field and open field. Get busy with activities so that residents see something happening.
5. The building is empty and very usable. Capitalize on it, but do so in conjunction with county building inspections.
6. The community is on the same page and moving in the same direction. This is huge. Do what it takes to keep everyone apprised. There will be hundreds of ideas and not all of them will be implemented. But everyone wants to be heard.
7. Continue to keep open communications with elected officials and to work with county staff.
8. A potential grant for 'Francisco Park' was implied during the Thursday meeting. There are other funding sources and grants to be found.
9. Continue to work with the fiber optic (telecommunications) companies to extend broadband internet. And use it as a tool for marketing, connection, updates, etc.
10. Visit, visit again and move here. Has since been changed to: Visit, visit again and make it yours. Excellent!





No one leaves Francisco hungry! Baked treats for CPNI team members.

VISIT, VISIT AGAIN, MAKE IT YOURS



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